

It's A PICK-a-PALOOZA

Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Guitar Picks

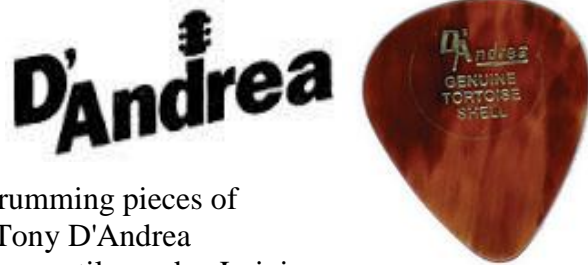


Contents

Introduction of the Pick!	3
How to Pick Your Pick	3
How to Use a Guitar Pick	7
Why Does My Pick Make a Clinking Noise?	8
The First Personal Pick Making Machine	8
Great Guitar Picking Sites	9

Introduction of the Pick!

Guitar picks...can't live with them, can't live without them. But that's probably because you keep losing them just like all the other guitar players in the world. So where did these little, umm, picked shaped, strumming pieces of plastic come from? In early 1902, Luigi and Tony D'Andrea immigrated to the U.S. They worked as laborers until one day Luigi saw a woman's celluloid compact. He was fascinated with this material and promptly bought a mallet and some "dies" along with the celluloid. Luigi began stamping out decorations using his "dies" and sold them around town. However, he quickly lost interest in this "boring" endeavor. One night, as Luigi and Tony were sitting around talking about what they could do with this material, Luigi's son picked up one of the trinkets and stated the obvious, "Papa, this looks like Cousin Prima's mandolin picks". In 1922, the D'Andrea brothers started a company named D'Andrea Picks. Later that same year, they created and sold the first known pick from a plastic, tortoise shell-like celluloid material. This laid the foundation for today's popular 351 and 346 style picks and, as they say, the rest is history.



How to Pick Your Pick

What is the smallest, most inexpensive piece of equipment you need when you play the guitar? You guessed it, a pick. How can the item you lose the most be such an important part of your guitar playing experience (as well as your audience)? The characteristics of the pick you choose such as material, thickness, texture, and shape has the most profound impact on the sound you create and also on your phrasing and articulation. Don't take this decision lightly. Know the sound you want to create and then choose your pick accordingly.



Luckily for you, there is an abundance of picks to choose from. There are as many styles of picks available as there are guitar playing styles. The key to choosing your pick is finding one that compliments your style. Let's do a little comparison.

Pick Sizes

Picks come in approximately 5 different sizes. You could probably find more if you look real hard, but these are the most common sizes:

- Extra Light (less than 0.44mm)
- Light (approx. 0.44mm to 0.69mm)
- Medium (approx. 0.70mm to 0.84mm)
- Heavy (approx. (0.85mm to 1.50mm)
- Extra Heavy (greater than 1.50mm)



Pick Material

As you can imagine, picks have come a long way since 1922. Although the majority of picks are still made from the celluloid material Luigi discovered, other materials are now used to create some unique and interesting picks. Below is a list of different pick material and a little about the pros and cons of each.

Material	Characteristics
Stone	No flexibility and very heavy. Resonates your string more completely. Can be worked into any shape. Takes longer to get used to.
Celluloid	Varying degrees of flexibility depending on the thickness. Highly flammable. Most popular.
Nylon/Acrylic	Smooth, slick surface. Comes in varying thicknesses. Typically lasts only 1-2 months.
Tortex/Delrex	Textured, easy to grip with sweaty fingers.
Acetal	Highest stiffness of all plastic.
Lexan	Very glossy and hard. Tends to wear out quickly.
Metal	Tends to be stiff. Wears out strings but produces a brighter sound than other pick material.

So now let's compare how the size and material of the pick makes a difference.

Light Picks vs Heavy Picks

The weight of the pick can have a huge effect on the tone. Lighter picks tend to give you a brighter or happier tone. These picks are usually thin and flexible and flow smoothly over the strings which results in a faster playing style. Biggest problem with these picks is they tend to break easily. Because they are thin and less dense, they don't last as long as the thicker, heavier pick. Something to consider when you are playing a long set. Need to have replacement picks readily available! But the smooth sound and clear quality make them a great choice.



The thick or heavy picks usually result in a much deeper tone. They are easier to hold because of the weight which makes these picks a favorite for many musicians. They don't tend to flop around between your fingers and you can produce a much more aggressive sound. You also don't have the concern the pick will break as they are much more durable than the thin picks. So if you are a heavy rocker or like that deep resonating sound you can produce by boldly strumming your strings, this type of pick is for you.

Which Pick?

First you should know there is no need to choose just one pick. Many guitar players like to play different types of music. You pick your pick based on the sound you are looking for or the type of music you are playing. The most commonly used pick is the medium plastic pick because it produces an even tone, offers durability and good sound quality. They have a nice balance between all the elements most players are looking for. It also offers the versatility of switching between playing styles which is a nice added bonus. Lead guitar players or any player who performs a lot of solos, will enjoy the medium pick.



If you lean toward the heavy metal or rock sound, then look for a strong, durable pick that will hold up to your aggressive strumming. You also need a pick that can without the beating it will take when strumming against the thicker gauge strings. This tends to wear down picks quickly so you need the thicker gauge pick which won't crumble or snap in two.

Heavy or thick picks are also generally preferred by Jazz players who use heavy gauge strings. These picks are perfect for digging into these flat wound strings to produce that unique jazz sound.

For those of you who prefer the soft rock or country music and use medium or light gauge strings, the light or extra light gauge pick should be your choice. These light weight picks, strumming along the same light weight strings, produces a very clear, light sound. Hard to go wrong with this combination.



How do you grip your pick?

Simple but important question to ask when choosing a pick. Harder, thicker picks are less flexible and therefore, more difficult to grasp and keep in place. They tend to slip more often and are more difficult to control. The thinner, softer plastic picks are easier to control and do need the “constant” guidance required by their thicker counterparts. You also might want to consider the texture of the pick you choose. The celluloid material tends to have a very smooth surface which could get slippery if you sweat while playing. Some picks purposely provide a textured surface so the pick does not slip between your fingers. Some also have a high-friction coating which aids your grip.

We could go on and on about the pros and cons of the hundreds of different picks you have to choose from. But what it really comes down to is your own personal preference. You have to choose a pick based on what works best, sounds best and feels best to you. Try the picks out playing different songs or different guitars if you more than one and see which one give you like best. Switch it up, play around with different thicknesses and materials, experiment and just have fun with your guitar. You’ll know it when you find the right one!

But always remember, if you ever tire of your existing picks, or maybe you are looking for a new sound, or if you find yourself pickless, you can always just grab your Pick-a-Palooza and make your own!



How to Use a Guitar Pick

¹Learning to use a guitar pick can be extremely awkward. Here are some guidelines to help you learn to use a pick easily and effectively.

Here's How:

1. Open your picking hand, and turn the palm to face you.
2. Close your hand to make a very loose fist. Your thumb should remain beside your index finger.
3. Rotate your hand until you are looking at it's profile, with your thumb's knuckle facing you.
4. With your other hand, slide your guitar pick between your thumb and index finger. The pick should be approximately located behind the knuckle of the thumb.
5. Be sure the pointed end of the pick is pointing directly away from your fist, and is protruding by about a half an inch. Hold the pick firmly.
6. Position your picking hand over the soundhole of your acoustic guitar, or over the body of your electric guitar. Your picking hand, with thumb knuckle still facing you, should hover over the strings.
7. Do not rest your picking hand on the strings or body of the guitar.
8. Using your wrist for motion (rather than your entire arm), strike the sixth (lowest) string of your guitar in a downward motion. If the string rattles excessively, try striking the string a bit softer, or with less of the pick surface.
9. Now, pick the sixth string in an upwards motion.
10. Repeat the process several times. Try and minimize motion in your picking hand: one short picking stroke downwards, then one short picking stroke upwards. This process is referred to as 'alternate picking'
11. Try the same exercise on the fifth, fourth, third, second, and first strings. Play any scales you know using this alternate picking method (down, up, down, up, etc.)



Tips:

1. Holding the pick in this manner will invariably feel awkward at first. You will initially have to pay special attention to your picking hand whenever you play guitar.
2. Try and create fluidity in your alternate picking. Your downstrokes should sound virtually identical to your upstrokes.
3. Pay attention to the rhythm you are playing when picking. Are your upstrokes and downstrokes identical rhythmically? Practice until they are.

Here's an entertaining video for you to view:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6u9QQQiy7Q>

¹ (Cross, 2011) http://guitar.about.com/c/ht/00/07/How_Use_Pick0962934247.htm

Why Does My Pick Make a Clinking Noise?

Do you ever hear an extra clinking sound when you play one string and then your pick falls against the next string? If you do, you are not alone. This is one of those subtle but often annoying side effects of using a pick. But the good news is there are several things you can do to lessen this sound. Let's look at them one at a time.

- Thicker or harder picks tends to make a louder sound. Try a softer/thinner pick.
- Don't grip your pick as tightly. Hold it a little looser so your fingers absorb some of the vibrations.
- Try to strike the string at more of an angle. This lessens the chance of hitting the string below. It also results in less contact with the string which in turn creates less clinking sound.
- Follow through when you strike the string with your pick. Make it a smooth, fluid motion all the way through the string. This might seem obvious but it actually takes some practice and a strong wrist.
- Finally, you may actually come to like that clinking noise. Once you know what is causing it, you now have control over how much or how little you want to hear. Who knows, that little extra sound just might be an added bonus to your new riff!



The First Personal Pick Making Machine

The Kork Grip Pick Company of Oakland, California is the first known creator of the personal pick making machine. The machine (pictured at the right) was displayed at the front of their pick making factory and allowed visitors to create their own picks out of old (or new) credit cards or any other piece of plastic they found lying around. It was quite a novelty and many visitors enjoyed creating a unique pick all by themselves. All you had to do was insert any piece of plastic, press down on the pedal and out popped your pick. What a great idea and foundation on which the Pick-a-Palooza was born!



Great Guitar Picking Sites

<http://guitarlessonsforbeginnersonline.net/guitarsongpickingpatternvideo>

Are you a beginner guitar player or know someone who is trying to learn the guitar? Check out this site for some great beginning lessons. Even if you are a seasoned guitar player, you may pick up something new!

<http://www.justinguitar.com/en/BC-107-PicksHolding.php>

Good demonstration of how to hold the pick correctly.

<http://www.fretjam.com/guitar-picking-techniques.html>

A nice variety of guitar picking techniques you can try.

<http://www.wikihow.com/Strum-a-Guitar>

A nice little “How To” with great information for newbies as well as experienced players.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FRJ8AGdg950>

Great demonstration of the different guitar picks sounds and sizes. Must see!